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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HONG KONG 001817

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DEPT FOR EAP AND EAP/CM
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [HK](#) [CH](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: CHINA ORDAINS BISHOP AGAINST VATICAN'S WISHES,
VATICAN-BEIJING TIES AT RISK

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Classified By: E/P Chief Simon Schuchat. Reasons: 1.4(b,d).

11. (C) Summary: On April 30, the Catholic Diocese of Kunming ordained a new bishop at a ceremony organized by the government-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and ignored appeals from the Holy See to postpone the ordination ceremony of Father Ma Yinglin, who had not been approved by the Holy See. The day before the ordination ceremony, Cardinal Joseph Zen of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese urged Beijing to postpone the ceremony, saying it would wreck ongoing talks between the Vatican and Beijing over normalization of relations. In a break with previous practice, the Holy See only received late notice of Ma's election by the local diocese and had insufficient time to investigate his suitability as a bishop. Our Catholic contacts told us that the private view from the Vatican is that Ma is too close to the PRC government and does not have sufficient pastoral experience. Moreover, Ma's duties as a delegate to the National People's Congress might create a conflict of interest with his duties as a bishop. Cardinal Zen said that the Vatican was expected to make a "very strong reaction to underline the seriousness of the matter" soon. The Holy See also expected the ordination of another bishop without a papal mandate on May 3. End Summary.

Beijing Ignores Vatican Request to Delay Ordination

12. (C) On April 30, the Catholic Diocese of Kunming (Yunnan Province) ordained a new bishop at a ceremony organized by the government-sanctioned Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and ignored appeals from the Holy See to postpone the ordination ceremony of Father Ma Yinglin. Ma's consecration marks the first time since January 2000 that a Chinese bishop had been appointed without the tacit approval of the Holy See.

13. (C) The day before the ordination ceremony, Cardinal Joseph Zen of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese urged Beijing to postpone Father Ma's ordination, saying it would wreck ongoing talks between the Vatican and Beijing over normalization of relations. In a statement faxed to the Kunming diocese on April 29, Zen said, "the Holy See until today has not approved Father Ma Yingling to accept episcopal ministry. Therefore, the ordaining bishop and co-ordaining bishops as well as Father Ma are requested to suspend the ordination." Despite Zen's appeal, Father Ma was consecrated in the presence of 1,000 guests, including CPPCA Vice Chairman Liu Bainian on Sunday, April 30. Liu dismissed the

Holy See's appeals and reportedly stated, "The Vatican and China don't have diplomatic relations so this (appointment of Ma) is China's sovereign authority...The Vatican didn't oppose this so we should keep moving forward." The PRC Foreign Ministry issued a statement on the same day, saying, "We hope the Vatican can respect the will of the Chinese Church and the vast numbers of its priests and church members so as to create a good atmosphere for the improvement of Sino-Vatican ties."

¶4. (C) After Ma's consecration, Zen told the press on April 30, "I fear the move is quite serious as it makes for a lack of confidence on both sides. Although negotiations have been proceeding smoothly, they have gone and done something against our expectations." On May 2, Papal Nuncio Eugene Nugent told poloff that the repercussions for those attending the ceremony were serious. By participating in the ordination ceremony, Ma will be in de facto breach of ecclesial communion and will automatically be excommunicated; the ordaining bishop, Bishop Dong Guangqing of Hankou, in Hubei province, may also be in breach of this rule. According to a report by the "Union of Catholic Asian News" (UCAN) on May 1, another eight bishops, recognized by both Beijing and the Holy See, were also in attendance (Bishops Anicetus Wang Chongyi of Guiyang, Fang Xingyao of Linyi, Joseph Li Mingshu of Qingdao and Paul Su Yongda of Zhanjiang, Coadjutor Bishops Yu Runchen of Hanzhong and Joseph Zhang Xianwang of Jinan, and Auxiliary Bishops Peter Fang Jianping of Tangshan and Paul He Zeqing of Wanzhou). In response to a question by poloff about whether or not all of the bishops attending Father Ma's ceremony would be excommunicated, Nugent said that each bishop's case would be judged on a case-by-case basis.

¶5. (C) Though the Patriotic Association claimed that Kunming urgently needed a bishop and could not delay the ceremony, Holy Spirit Study Center Senior Researcher Anthony Lam said that the Kunming diocese had effectively not had a bishop in

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twenty five years and could see no reason why Beijing could not have postponed the ceremony.

Beijing Breaks Unofficial Bishop Appointment Process

¶6. (C) One of the two obstacles to an improvement of Vatican-PRC relations has been how to handle the appointment of bishops. Over the past 3-4 years, both sides appeared to have come to an unofficial understanding of how to handle the appointment of bishops. Lam explained that there actually two levels of understanding. The first level involved the Holy See and the Beijing Government; both sides agreed that neither side would do anything considered unacceptable by the other side. And regarding the consecrations of bishops, both sides would be given an opportunity to approve the candidate. The second level of understanding was between the local diocese and the Holy See. The local diocese must seek approval by the Holy See for bishop candidates and could not "self-elect and self-appoint" a bishop. Local diocese understood that a bishop without the papal mandate, or a "green light" from the Holy See, would not be able to carry out his pastoral duties, said Lam.

¶7. (C) Nugent told us that under previous practice, China would notify the Holy See of the election of a bishop and the Vatican would normally spend several months investigating the background of that individual. This would normally include writing to people familiar with the candidate and soliciting their opinions. However, in the case of Father Ma, who was elected by the Kunming Diocese on January 21, Nugent only received official notification of Ma's election in early March and received word of the April 30 ordination ceremony only 2-3 weeks ago. With such a short turnaround, Nugent even solicited responses by fax, a communication method he deemed "risky." According to Lam, the Holy See asked Ma to

postpone the ceremony, because they had not had enough time to determine his suitability as a bishop. Lam acknowledged that Ma may have been under some pressure by the CPPCA who may have insisted on rushing the consecration ceremony.

A Conflict of Interest

¶18. (C) On April 30, Nugent told Consul General Cunningham that while the public line is that the Vatican simply wanted more time to consider Ma's appointment, the private view from the Vatican is that Ma is too close to the PRC government and does not have sufficient pastoral experience. Nugent also told poloff on May 2 that the most serious concern regarding Ma is the fact that he is a delegate to the National People's Congress (NPC). This creates a conflict of interest between his duties as a bishop and goes against canon law. Nugent added, that Ma was "avid for power" and might be in line for the bishop's job in Beijing.

¶19. (C) There has been speculation in the press that some bishops had been misled into attending Father Ma's ordination ceremony, believing that he had received papal approval. However, Nugent said it was quite "easy" for church leaders to determine whether someone had a papal mandate. Even if they had been misled into traveling to Kunming, each bishop should have asked to see Father Ma's proof of papal blessing, a letter written in Latin by Nugent, stating the Holy See's approval of the individual.

Impact on Vatican-Beijing Relations

¶10. (C) Lam told us that Ma's consecration would likely slow down the process of establishing relations between the Vatican and Beijing. Nugent said he regarded the ordination of Ma without papal approval as a "very unfriendly gesture." Cardinal Zen told the "South China Morning Post" that the Vatican was expected to make a "very strong reaction to underline the seriousness of the matter" soon.

¶11. (C) Nugent warned that there would be another ordination of a bishop, without papal mandate, at 8:30 am on May 3. Father Liu Xinhong of Wuhu city, in Anhui province was a "good fellow" but was also close to the PRC government, said Nugent. Father Liu was not as "problematic" a candidate as Father Ma, but there were "issues about his past" which might prevent Holy See approval. With insufficient time to conduct a proper check on Father Liu, Nugent said he planned to issue a statement to the bishops of the region, warning them not to

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attend tomorrow's ordination ceremony.

Biographic Information on Father Ma

¶12. (C) Father Ma was born in 1965 and graduated from Hebei Seminary and Sheshan Regional Seminary in Shanghai in the 1980s. In 1989, he was ordained a priest of Xingtai diocese. Since 1998, Ma has been Secretary General of the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China. According to UCAN, he was designated a priest of Kunming diocese two years ago, but has mostly staying in Beijing. He was elected chairman of Yunnan province's CPPCA in 2005 and was also appointed a deputy to the NPC. Cunningham